

President	Franklin Pierce
Chronological Order	14
Life Span	1804-1869
Home State	New Hampshire
Elected	1852
Political Party	Democratic
Vice President	William R. King
First Lady	Jane Appleton Pierce
Children	3 sons
Physical Attributes	5'10" tall, dark auburn hair, blue eyes, square jaw, slender muscular physique
Undergraduate Education	Bowdoin College
Military Service	Brigadier General in the Mexican War
Profession	Attorney
Political Offices	U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senator
Nickname	Handsome Frank
Family Lineage	English
Religious Affiliation	Episcopalian



1. Handsome, friendly, and immensely popular, New Hampshire's Franklin Pierce had been elected to two terms in the U.S. House of Representatives and one in the U.S. Senate by the age of thirty-two. After serving as a brigadier general in the Mexican War, he won the Democratic presidential nomination in 1852 when the convention deadlocked over more prominent candidates. Pierce won a landslide victory in the general election and became the youngest man (age forty-eight) yet to be elected president. He had coattails – the Democratic Party captured formidable majorities in both houses of Congress. Pierce entered the White House with a deep devotion to preserving his beloved Democratic Party and the Union. However, as president, he made decisions that wrecked the former and propelled the latter down the disastrous slope towards civil war. He is widely regarded as one of the worst presidents in American history.

2. Franklin's father, Benjamin, was a Revolutionary War hero from Massachusetts. As a teenager, Benjamin enlisted in the Continental Army when he heard about the fighting at Lexington and Concord in 1775. He fought in the Battle of Bunker Hill and the Siege of Fort Ticonderoga and spent the winter with George Washington at Valley Forge. He mustered out of the army as a lieutenant in 1784 with a medal from Washington. Military service was a Pierce family tradition. Benjamin's two eldest sons, Benjamin and John, served in the War of 1812, and Franklin served in the Mexican War.

In 1786, Benjamin moved to the frontier town of Hillsborough in western New Hampshire, where he built a farm and ran a tavern. In 1805, he became the commanding general of the state militia. Benjamin served in the New Hampshire House of Representatives from 1786 to 1788 and twice as Sheriff of Hillsborough County, from 1809 to 1812 and later from 1818 to 1827. He served two nonconsecutive one-year terms as the governor of New Hampshire in the late 1820s.

Benjamin was a Jeffersonian Republican who loathed Federalists as elitist snobs. His animosity deepened when a Federalist majority in the state legislature purged him from the office of sheriff after he had defied an order from a Federalist judge.

3. As a boy, Franklin loved the outdoors – hiking, swimming, fishing, and ice skating – far more than school. And even as a boy, he showed the personal charm that would smooth his political rise. Pierce did not like

school, but his father, who lacked formal education, insisted that his sons attend college. One of Franklin's older brothers attended West Point and another Dartmouth College. When it came time to send Franklin off to college, Federalists controlled Dartmouth, so Benjamin sent him to Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. Brunswick is in the southwestern part of the state, near the New Hampshire border.

Pierce arrived in Brunswick for the fall 1820 term a few months shy of his sixteenth birthday. Bowdoin was a very small college, but it attracted an astonishing number of young men destined for national prominence. William Pitt Fessenden, a future Whig and Republican senator from Maine was in the class ahead of Pierce's, and James Bradbury, a future Democratic senator from Maine, was in the student body at the same time. John P. Hale, who was a freshman when Pierce was a senior, went on to represent New Hampshire in the U.S. House and Senate. Calvin Stowe, the future husband of Harriet Beecher Stowe, was the valedictorian of Pierce's class, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Nathaniel Hawthorne were one year behind them. Hawthorne became Franklin's lifelong best friend and wrote his campaign biography in 1852.

While in college, Pierce became interested in national politics. He supported Andrew Jackson for president in 1824 and was outraged when the "corrupt bargain" gave the White House to New Englander John Quincy Adams.

4. After graduation, Pierce returned to his parents' home in Hillsborough and began to read law with a local attorney. He moved to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in the spring of 1825 to study in the law office of Levi Woodbury, and, after Woodbury left to serve in the U.S. Senate, to another lawyer in Massachusetts. Franklin completed his legal studies in New Hampshire and was admitted to the bar in September 1827, two months shy of his twenty-third birthday. He then returned to Hillsborough to start his practice.

The interest Pierce developed at Bowdoin in national politics increased during his months in Portsmouth, a former Federalist and pro-Adams bastion. He sympathized with the efforts of Woodbury and Isaac Hill, a Concord newspaper editor, to organize a New Hampshire pro-Jackson political party, which evolved into part of the Democratic Party being organized by Martin Van Buren. Pierce wrote a friend, "A republic without parties is a complete anomaly. The citizens are convinced that Jeffersonian principles are the principles for a free people, and I trust they have no notion of renouncing their faith."

Pierce put these beliefs into practice when he returned to Hillsborough. In 1827 his father was elected governor for the first time with no organized opposition. In 1828, Franklin campaigned hard for his father, but pro-Adams men rallied to prevent his re-election. In 1829, Benjamin won back the governorship and Franklin, just twenty-four years old, was elected to the New Hampshire House of Representatives. Franklin was re-elected three times and elected Speaker his last two terms. (These were one-year terms.) During Pierce's stay in the state legislature, New Hampshire evolved into a strong state for the Democratic Party. By the 1850s, it was the most reliably Democratic state in the North.

5. Pierce's interest in politics, devotion to Jeffersonian principles, and deep commitment to the new Democratic Party endured for the rest of his life. Nevertheless, he had studied law to make a living, not run for office, and he gradually developed into a successful advocate. Pierce lacked an incisive legal mind but had other attributes that served him well in the civil and criminal cases he argued before juries. He had a prodigious memory for names and faces, a trait that helped him in his political career as well. Pierce could address individual jurors by name when pleading cases, and he could remember those names for years after. He had a deep rich voice, a trait that helped his political career because his audience could hear his unamplified voice at political rallies. Most important, he was charming, amiable, and empathetic. Pierce directed his arguments to the jurors' emotions, not their collective logic, and he usually won.

6. In 1833, at the age of 28, Pierce was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives with 76 percent of the statewide vote. He was re-elected in 1835 with 63 percent of the vote. As a congressman, Pierce supported the policies of President Andrew Jackson and voted the Democratic Party line on almost every issue. He also got a reputation for being a "doughface," a northern man with southern sympathies. Specifically, he was willing to accept the continuation of slavery for the sake of national unity.

The issue that dominated the House during his second term was how to handle the thousands of petitions pouring in demanding that Congress abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. The question came to a head in December 1835 when a congressman from South Carolina demanded that the House summarily reject abolitionist petitions without considering them or even officially receiving them. For Pierce and many other congressmen, even some southerners, this was too much because it violated the people's constitutional right to petition the government. Pierce told the House in a speech that the proper course was to receive such petitions and then automatically table them without any further consideration. The House ultimately

adopted this solution in May of 1836 in what became known as the Gag Rule.

7. Pierce's support of the Gag Rule was based on his opinion of the abolition movement. He detested it almost from the moment it began to organize in the 1830s. Never a particularly religious or pious man, Pierce found the holier-than-thou attitude of abolitionists and their penchant for condemning anyone who did not join their movement as a sinner deeply offensive. Equally important, he feared that abolitionist agitation, if unchecked, could split the nation in two. Over time, Pierce's negative attitude towards abolition evolved into hostility to any northern group that opposed slavery and its expansion westward in any way, even if it did not seek immediate abolition. By the 1850s, his stance on sectional disputes over slavery and its westward expansion was flatly pro-southern, not simply anti-abolition.

8. In 1834, Pierce married Jane Means Appleton, the daughter of Jesse Appleton, former president of Bowdoin College, Pierce's alma mater. Franklin and Jane were opposites in both ideology and personality. Jane's family were members of the Whig Party, which arose in the 1830s to oppose Franklin's beloved Democratic Party. Jane was an ardent supporter of the temperance movement, and Franklin liked to drink. Jane believed that slavery should be abolished, while Franklin did not. Jane was reclusive and hated politics; Franklin was affable and loved politics. Jane hated living in Washington, D.C., complaining that the city's suffocating humidity damaged her fragile health. She refused to live there when Franklin became a U.S. senator.

Jane and Franklin suffered a string of personal tragedies. The couple had three children, all boys. They lost their first son three days after he was born. Their second son, age four, died during a typhus epidemic seven years later. They doted on their third son, Benjamin ("Benny"), but after Franklin won the presidency, eleven-year-old Benny was killed in a horrific train accident while traveling with his parents. The accident traumatized Jane, and she was never really the same again.

9. In 1836, at the age of 32, Pierce became the youngest man yet elected to the U.S. Senate. By 1841, the Whigs had control of the White House and both houses of Congress, and Pierce found himself in the minority for the first time in his precocious political career. He and other Democrats sat by as the Whigs, led by Henry Clay, rammed through a package of economic legislation Pierce hated.

By February 1842, Pierce was frustrated by his minority status and aware he could not be re-elected because New Hampshire Democrats chose to rotate the state's Senate seats. He was also unhappy that his wife and child were not living with him in Washington and anxious to increase the income from his law practice in New Hampshire. Therefore, he resigned his Senate seat a full year before his term expired.

10. When Pierce returned home to New Hampshire in 1842, he promised Jane that he would not run for public office, and he kept this promise until he was nominated for president in 1852. However, during this decade, he was still involved in politics as the leader of the New Hampshire Democratic Party. During this time, Pierce went to great lengths to eliminate antislavery or anti-southern sentiment from the state Democratic organization.

11. During his time in the U.S. House of Representatives, Pierce befriended Speaker James K. Polk of Tennessee, and when Polk ran for president in 1844, Pierce campaigned hard for him. Pierce wanted to serve when the Mexican War broke out, and Polk appointed him commander and colonel of the Ninth Infantry Regiment in February 1847. One month later, he was promoted to brigadier general. (N.B. Polk made the appointment despite Pierce having no prior military experience.)

Pierce was ordered to join commanding General Winfield Scott at Vera Cruz in preparation for an attack on Mexico City. By the time Pierce reached the port of Vera Cruz, Scott had long since moved more than a hundred miles inland, where he awaited Pierce and his brigade as well as a wagon train of supplies for his army. In Vera Cruz, Pierce's immediate task was to assemble transportation for Scott's supplies and then march the 2,500 men under his command and scores of wagons and a battery of heavy artillery through 150 miles of enemy territory to his rendezvous with Scott. Along the route, Pierce's men came under attack six times, and a few were wounded. The journey took twenty-one days, and Pierce displayed considerable skill and determination in accomplishing it. It was his finest achievement in Mexico, one that Scott would commend in his dispatches to Washington.

In contrast, the remainder of his brief military career went poorly. The New Englanders under his command acquitted themselves quite well in a series of battles outside Mexico City, but personal glory eluded him. Pierce was on his horse and ready to lead the brigade in a frontal assault on an enemy position in his first serious battle. But a Mexican artillery salvo frightened his horse, causing it to buck and throwing Pierce's

groin violently against the saddle pommel. He briefly lost consciousness and began to fall from the saddle. The horse then tripped and fell on Pierce's knee, resulting in a serious and painful injury. After Pierce regained consciousness, he told his orderly to quickly secure one of his regimental commanders to lead the attack. But the damage to his leadership had been done. Perhaps resentful of a political general like Pierce, some soldiers claimed that Pierce had fainted in response to the enemy fire. They called him "Fainting Frank" behind his back. His luck in two subsequent battles was not great either. The war ended in February 1848, and Pierce returned to New Hampshire one month later.

12. At the 1852 Democratic National Convention, the party encountered a serious problem. Each of the four leading candidates for the presidential nomination – James Buchanan, Lewis Cass, William Marcy, and Stephen A. Douglas—faced strong opposition from one faction of the party or another. As a result, none of them could obtain the two-thirds majority of delegates needed for the nomination. Ballot after ballot produced more hostility within the divided party, and a deadlock ensued.

After thirty-four ballots, it became apparent that a new candidate – a dark horse – was needed. In order to attract the votes of both northern and southern delegates, it became clear that a proslavery northerner might be the best bet. Pierce's political machine in New Hampshire sensed this and began quietly working the convention floor, particularly among southerners. Pierce's name was placed in nomination on the thirty-fifth ballot by the Virginia delegation.

The fact that many of the delegates had never even heard of Pierce helped. Having few enemies, Pierce could be marketed by his supporters into whatever the delegates were looking for in a candidate. Franklin was an ideal candidate: handsome, friendly, a fine speaker, a Mexican-American War veteran, and, above all, a man not forceful enough to ruffle anyone's feathers. Weary of fighting, the Democrats handed Pierce the nomination on the forty-ninth ballot. Pierce did not attend the convention. When he and his wife were informed of his victory, Franklin seemed stunned, and Jane fainted.

13. In 1852, the Whig Party was fragmenting over slavery. At the Whig National Convention, none of the leading candidates—President Fillmore, Senator Daniel Webster, and Mexican War hero General Winfield Scott—strongly appealed to a majority of party members. Northern Whigs disliked Fillmore for enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law. Webster was aged and unwell. Southern Whigs opposed Scott because of his association with William H. Seward, the stridently antislavery senator from New York. Scott won the nomination on the fifty-third ballot.

The most compelling case for Pierce's candidacy was delivered in print through his campaign biography, *The Life of Franklin Pierce*, a best-seller written by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne had already published two critically acclaimed novels, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, and wanted to help his friend (and make a little money). Hawthorne's willingness to take on the project was frowned upon by his New England literary peers, e.g., Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Louisa May Alcott, all of whom disapproved of Pierce's support for southern slaveowners.

In the general election, the Democrats rallied around Pierce, and Scott turned out to be a long-winded, unpopular candidate. Pierce ran on the Democratic Party platform, which supported the Compromise of 1850, Fugitive Slave Law and all. He won 27 of 31 states and an electoral college landslide, 252 to 42. The nation's electorate had spoken emphatically. It wanted no tampering with the Compromise of 1850 and no further agitation on the slavery issue. The Democrats won large majorities in the House and Senate.

14. On January 6, 1853, Pierce, his wife Jane, and their eleven-year-old son Benny boarded a train in Andover, Massachusetts, to take them to Concord, New Hampshire. The train consisted of a single passenger car. About a mile out of Andover, the car derailed and tumbled down into a twenty-foot ditch, landing on its roof. Pierce, who had been sitting next to Jane, was severely bruised but alive, as was Jane. But Benny, who had been sitting alone in the seat behind them, had the back of his head sheared off and died instantly. Franklin and Jane saw this ghastly sight and were distraught. Jane was so undone that she remained in Andover rather than come home to Concord for the funeral. Nor would she travel to Washington in March for Pierce's inauguration.

Jane, accompanied by her cousin Abby Means, eventually arrived at the capital eighteen days after the inauguration. For almost two years, she spent most of her time in seclusion while Abby or Jefferson Davis's wife Varina served as the hostess at Pierce's many dinner parties for congressmen and the diplomatic corps. It would not be until the end of 1854 that Jane appeared at the dinners.

15. Mississippi Democrat Jefferson Davis campaigned in numerous southern states for Pierce in 1852, and

Franklin repaid him by choosing him for secretary of war. Davis was an excellent choice because he was a graduate of West Point and a colonel and hero in the army during the Mexican War. During the war, Davis raised a volunteer regiment and armed it with brand-new Model 1841 rifles instead of the usual smoothbore muskets. The regiment became known as the Mississippi Rifles and was extremely effective in combat.

Davis had lost his first wife – Zachary Taylor's daughter Sarah – to malaria after only three months of marriage, so when Pierce was devastated by Benny's accident, Davis was able to empathize with him. Eventually, the two men became close friends and political allies. They remained friends for life, even after Mississippi seceded and Davis became the president of the Confederate States of America.

16. In his inaugural address, Pierce stated, "I believe that involuntary servitude as it exists in different States in this Confederacy is recognized by the Constitution... I hold that the laws of 1850, commonly called the 'compromise measures,' are strictly constitutional and to be unhesitatingly carried into effect. I fervently hope that the [slavery] question is at rest and that no sectional or fanatical excitement may again threaten the durability of our institutions or obscure the light of our prosperity."

17. At the beginning of Pierce's term, railway promoters, both North and South, had projected many drawing-board routes to the Pacific Coast. But the estimated cost in all cases was so high that there could be only one line for many years. Should it be in the North or the South? The South, yearly falling behind in the economic race with the North, was eager to extend a railroad line through the adjacent southwestern territory to California.

Campaigns of the Mexican War had shown that the most feasible southern railway route ran slightly south of the Mexican border, so purchasing more land from Mexico was desirable. Jefferson Davis persuaded Pierce to make the purchase, and the president appointed James Gadsden, a prominent South Carolina railroad man, Minister to Mexico. Gadsden purchased the required territory – the southern quarter of Arizona plus the southwest corner of New Mexico – for \$10 million in 1853. The so-called Gadsden Purchase aroused much criticism from northerners, who wanted a northern railroad route to the Pacific. They condemned the administration for paying such a massive sum for a cactus-strewn desert the size of South Carolina. The first transcontinental railroad was built along a northern route, not the southern route. However, a transcontinental railroad along the southern route was completed by the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1883.

18. Pierce – like his friend James K. Polk – wanted to purchase Cuba from Spain. Southerners viewed this as an excellent opportunity to add one or more slave states to the Union. Unfortunately, Pierce gave the wrong man the delicate task of negotiating with Spain's poor but proud king. Pierce had named Pierre Soulé, an overbearing southerner, Minister to Spain and given him instructions to go as high as \$130 million for the purchase of Cuba. But Soulé had little patience for the slow ways of the Spanish court, and the more he tried to bully Spain into selling Cuba, the more that nation resisted the idea.

Pierce suggested that Soulé meet with America's ministers to Great Britain (James Buchanan) and France (John Y. Mason) to devise a strategy for acquiring Cuba. In 1854, they met in Ostend, Belgium, and drafted the "Ostend Manifesto," an internal position paper intended only for President Pierce and Secretary of State Marcy. It stressed the dangers to the United States should Cuba's slaves be emancipated, which the new Spanish military governor-general of Cuba was threatening to do. It praised Pierce for enforcing American neutrality laws against planned filibuster expeditions into Cuba. And it predicted that if resident Cubans revolted against Spain, American citizens would probably come to their aid.

The Manifesto was leaked to the press in 1855, and the U.S. was accused of plotting to seize Cuba by force. Marcy was forced to repudiate it, and any chance of acquiring Cuba vanished.

19. "Nebraska" referred to the still unorganized area of the Louisiana Purchase west of Missouri, Iowa, and the Minnesota Territory. By the early 1850s, the pressure was growing from two groups to organize the area into territories. Farmers wanted to acquire legal title to land there, as did railroad executives and supporters who wanted to build a northern transcontinental railroad to the Pacific.

What made the Nebraska question explosive was the slavery issue. All the area of any proposed territories carved out of the Nebraska area lay north of the latitude line thirty-six degrees, thirty minutes, from which slavery had been *forever prohibited* by the Missouri Compromise of 1820. Even though they had agreed to this compromise only thirty years earlier, southerners in the Senate refused to allow the organization of the Nebraska area into territories where slavery was forbidden. Their stated reasons were twofold. First, banning slavery in the new territories would further disrupt the Senate's free state/slave state balance. (The admission of California as a free state in 1850 had already given the free states a one-state advantage.)

Second, slaveholders in Missouri, particularly numerous near the state's western boundary, feared that any new free territory on their border would become a refuge for fugitive slaves. Southerners wanted to add a slave state to the Union from the Nebraska area, but that would require finessing, if not outright repealing, the ban on slavery in the Missouri Compromise.

20. The driving force behind the effort to organize the Nebraska area into territories was Stephen A. Douglas, chairman of the Senate Committee on the Territories. His Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 had two provisions. First, the Nebraska area would be divided into two territories: Kansas (west of slave-holding Missouri) and Nebraska (west of free-soil Iowa and the Minnesota Territory). Second, the status of the two new territories regarding slavery would be determined by popular sovereignty, and the ban on slavery in the Missouri Compromise would be explicitly repealed. (Most people presumed that Kansas would become a slave state and Nebraska a free state.)

The nebulous justification given for the second provision was that the method used to decide the slavery issue in the Compromise of 1850, namely popular sovereignty for New Mexico and Utah, should supersede the Missouri Compromise provisions on slavery and make them null and void. Douglas recognized that this provision would be offensive to many northerners, including northern Democrats, so he decided to seek Pierce's support for the measure to bring administration pressure on northern Democratic congressmen.

Jefferson Davis arranged a meeting between Douglas, Pierce, himself, and six influential southern senators and congressmen who supported the bill. No one knows what went on at this meeting, but the result was that the others convinced Pierce to support the bill – even the part about the nullification of the Missouri Compromise. Subsequently, Pierce demanded party loyalty to what was now an administration measure. He also leveraged federal patronage to the hilt to push the bill through the House. The bill passed and was signed into law by Pierce in May 1854.

21. Signing off on the Kansas-Nebraska Act was the worst mistake of Franklin Pierce's political career. In the fall elections of 1854 and spring elections of 1855, Democrats suffered crushing defeats in the North. As a result, the composition of the House of Representatives changed drastically. The makeup of the House before the elections was 150 Democrats, 68 Whigs, and 16 members of minority parties. The composition after the elections was 83 Democrats, 54 Whigs, 51 Know Nothings, 22 Anti-Nebraska, 13 Republicans, 9 members of the People's Party, and 3 others. Democrats lost every congressional seat in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire. The new Speaker of the House was Know Nothing Nathaniel P. Banks.

22. The rebuff of the Democratic Party did not benefit the Whigs, who also lost seats in the House. Instead, a diverse conglomeration of new political coalitions emerged to compete with the Whigs for the anti-Democratic vote.

Whigs in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, and the northern third of Illinois were angry at Southern Whigs because of their betrayal over Nebraska and quit the party. They joined anti-Nebraska Democrats and Free-Soilers to form anti-Nebraska coalitions. In Michigan, Wisconsin, and the northern counties of Illinois, the coalition called itself the Republican Party. (The name arose from their goal of fighting for the basic principles of republican government and against the aristocracy of southern slaveholders, who they felt had too much political power.) In other Midwestern states, they called themselves the People's Party. In the Northeast, the nativist American Party (a.k.a. the Know Nothings) tapped into anti-immigrant sentiment to take seats away from the Democrats and the Whigs. (Members of the American Party were required to say "I know nothing" whenever they were asked about its specifics by outsiders.)

23. When Pierce signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, fewer than eight hundred white settlers were in the new Kansas Territory. Soon, two groups of people flooded in: proslavery southerners and "free-staters," antislavery northerners. The proslavery immigrants settled near towns such as Leavenworth and Atchison, the free-staters near Lawrence and Topeka. Some of the free-staters were sponsored by northern abolitionist societies, which infuriated southerners. Whether or not Kansas was to be a slave state or a free state would be decided by which group controlled the territorial legislature.

The elections for the territorial legislature were held on March 30, 1855. Days before election day, thousands of heavily armed proslavery "Border Ruffians" streamed into Kansas from Missouri, intent on electing proslavery legislators, even though they were not Kansas residents. (One source reported approximately 2,400 during the three days before the election.) On election day, the Border Ruffians took over polling places and cast not only their own illegal ballots but also hundreds of additional, wholly fictitious ballots for proslavery legislative candidates. They also intimidated many free-staters into not voting. The

results were 5,427 votes for proslavery candidates, 791 for free-state candidates, and 92 for others. Despite being badly outnumbered by free-state settlers in the territory, the proslavery factions won 37 of the 39 seats. A census taken a month earlier had recorded just 2,905 legal voters.

Free-staters loudly denounced the elections as fraudulent. Territorial Governor Andrew Reeder, a Pierce appointee, pleased neither side when he invalidated, as tainted by fraud, the results in only eleven of the legislative races. A special election was held on May 22 to elect replacements, and the results were dramatically different: eight of the eleven delegates elected in the special election were free-staters. This still left the proslavery camp with an overwhelming 29–10 advantage.

The proslavery legislature convened on July 2, 1855. It immediately invalidated the results from the special election in May and seated the proslavery delegates “elected” in March. The legislature then adopted a slave code for Kansas similar to Missouri’s and began passing laws favorable to slaveholders. Free-staters quickly elected delegates to a separate legislature, which proclaimed itself the legitimate government and called the proslavery government “bogus.”

24. Pierce admitted that the Border Ruffians had interfered with the election but justified their interference as a reaction to attempts by abolitionist groups in the Northeast to “colonize” Kansas. He said, “Whatever irregularities may have occurred in the elections, it seems too late now to raise that question... For all present purposes, the legislative body thus constituted and elected was the legitimate legislative assembly of the territory.”

He then ordered the members of the new “free-state” government to “disperse and retire peaceably to their respective abodes.” He also warned that any attempt at insurrection against the territorial government “would be resisted not only by the employment of the local militia but also by that of any available forces of the United States.”

In other words, Pierce was throwing the weight of the federal government behind the fraudulently elected, proslavery territorial legislature, which had brazenly deprived northern settlers in Kansas of fundamental rights and was determined to make Kansas a slave state. These actions destroyed his electability in the North in the election of 1856 and drove more people to join the Republican Party.

25. On May 5, 1856, one month before the Democratic National Convention, the proslavery chief justice of Kansas instructed a grand jury to indict the entire free-state government, which was located in the town of Lawrence. Between five and seven hundred Missourians surrounded Lawrence, and the free-state governor was arrested. Sheriff Samuel Jones arrived with his men, and Lawrence’s Committee of Public Safety surrendered their weapons. Sheriff Jones then set up four cannons and bombarded the Free State Hotel. Then he burned it to the ground. Newspaper presses were thrown in the river, and houses were looted and burned in what became known as the “Sacking of Lawrence.”

On May 19, Senator Charles Sumner gave a speech in the U.S. Senate in which he condemned the “Crime against Kansas” and castigated Senator Andrew Butler of South Carolina for supporting slavery. Two days later, Butler’s nephew, a congressman, came into the Senate and viciously beat Sumner with a cane, severely injuring him. It took Sumner three years to fully recover from the beating.

On May 24, the Doyle family had retired for the evening in their small home in Potawatomie Creek, Kansas. As midnight approached, there was a knock at the door, which was opened by the family patriarch, James. On the other side of the door were men armed with pistols and swords, who forced their way into the house. They removed James and his two oldest sons from the home and murdered them. Doyle and his sons were slave catchers, and their killers were led by John Brown, an abolitionist incensed by the news of the sacking of Lawrence and the attack on Sumner. Brown and his party would visit two more homes before sunrise, killing two more proslavery Kansans. This butchery brought vicious retaliation from proslavery men, which began the Kansas-Missouri Border War. This war continued intermittently in Kansas until it merged with the large-scale Civil War in 1861.

26. By the time of the 1856 Democratic National Convention, Franklin Pierce’s standing with the public had been badly damaged by the civil strife in the Kansas Territory over slavery. Many dissatisfied Democrats lined up behind James Buchanan, Pierce’s Minister to Great Britain, who had avoided the controversy over “Bleeding Kansas” by being overseas. A smaller group of Democrats supported Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois. Buchanan led on the first ballot at the convention and slowly grew his support on subsequent ballots. On the fourteenth ballot, Pierce instructed his delegates to back Douglas in order to deny Buchanan the nomination. Douglas withdrew his name on the seventeenth ballot after receiving assurances that Buchanan would not seek re-election in 1860; this move allowed Buchanan to win the nomination. Pierce became the first and only elected president who was an active candidate for re-election to be denied his party’s

nomination for a second term. In the 1856 general election, Buchanan defeated Republican John C. Fremont and Know Nothing Millard Fillmore.

27. Pierce settled in New Hampshire after his presidency. When the Civil War erupted, he said he supported a war to protect Washington and the North from southern invasion but could not support an aggressive war intended to subjugate the South. During the war, Pierce refrained from criticizing Lincoln until the Republican president (a) suspended the writ of habeas corpus and (b) prosecuted Ohio Peace Democrat Clement L. Vallandigham for calling the war a failure in 1863. In the former case, Pierce wrote Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Taney to criticize the suspension; in the latter, he spoke out strongly in favor of freedom of speech, even in wartime.

By the end of the war, Jane Pierce had died of tuberculosis, and his best friend Nathaniel Hawthorne had passed away too. Pierce was bitterly disappointed when Hawthorne's abolitionist friends, primarily members of the New England literati, denied him the opportunity to be a pallbearer at Hawthorne's funeral. The two deaths hit Franklin hard, and he began drinking heavily.

The postwar political issue that most engaged Pierce was the fate of Jefferson Davis, his good friend, former Cabinet member, and the ex-president of the Confederate States of America. After Union troops captured Davis in May 1865, he was imprisoned in Fort Monroe at Old Point Comfort on the southern tip of Virginia's eastern shore. When the government decided to prosecute Davis for treason in 1867, Pierce traveled from New Hampshire to Fort Monroe and offered his legal expertise. Davis was deeply touched but told Franklin that he did not need his help at the trial because he already had a legal team. Eventually, the government changed its mind and did not prosecute Davis.

Pierce died of cirrhosis of the liver in the fall of 1868 at age sixty-four.

See the next page for a list of references.



## References

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